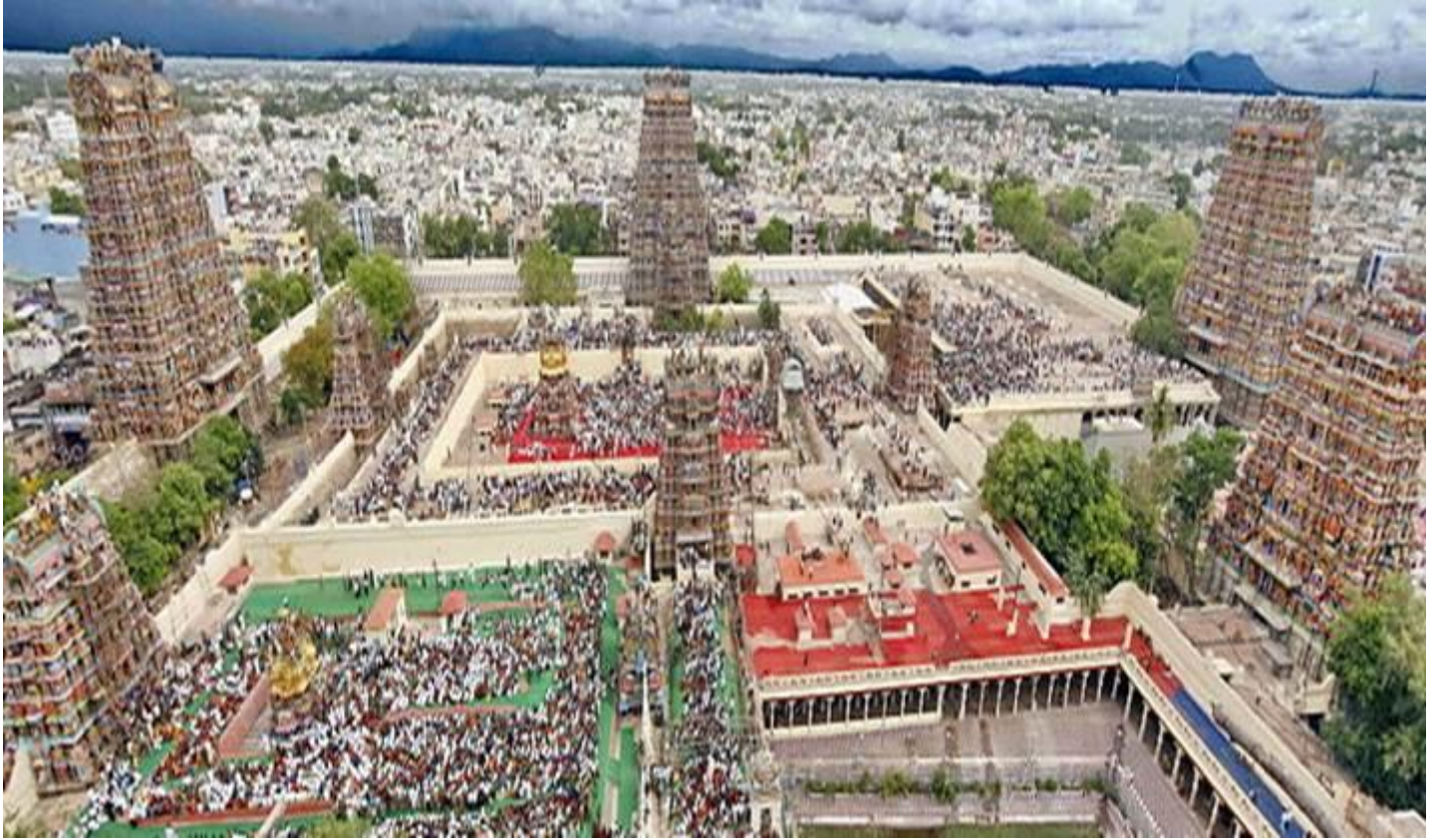


Madurai Yatra

Mathura of Southern India (Daksina-mathura)



Southern Mathura (Daksina-mathura), presently known as Madurai, is situated on the banks of the Vaigai River and is one of South India's great temple towns. Madurai is synonymous with the celebrated Meenakshi Temple. On the day the city was to be named, as Lord Siva blessed the land and its people, divine nectar (Madhu) was showered on the city from Lord Siva's matted locks. This city was henceforth known as Madhurapuri. During His South India tour in 1510 AD, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu visited Madurai twice, once while going to Rameswaram after meeting the brahmana Ramdasa Vipra, who was a staunch devotee of Lord Ramacandra. The next time was on the way back from Rameswaram with a copy of the Kurma Purana scripture, which had a verse stating that Ravana had kidnapped an illusory Sita, and that the real Sita was safely hidden by Agnideva. Lord Caitanya personally gave this copy to Ramdasa Vipra to dispel his doubts about mother Sita's kidnapping.

A great Vaishnava, Srila Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, who was a very close associate of Srila Sanatana Gosvami appeared in Madurai. the identity of Srila Narayana Bhatta Gosvami is revealed as Narada Muni in Vraja lila. Lord Balarama visited Madurai during His holy pilgrimage [Srimad-Bhagavatam Canto 10 chapter 79 verses 11-15]. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura visited Madurai in the year 1904 and collected all the information about the rites and rules of Vedic tridanda Vaishnava sannyasa from a Ramanujan tridandi Swami at Perambalur. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada also visited Madurai once during his household days for business. "It was at Madurai that Abhay showed some of his writings to Muthuswamy Chetty, another medical salesman. Mr. Chetty was impressed and felt he could persuade his wealthy friend Dr. Alagappa Chettiar, the famous Birla of the South, to finance the printing of Geetopanishad manuscript." - Prabhupada Lilamrita. However this project could not progress ahead as Abhay found his original manuscript missing from his house which he could never ever find. Probably stolen by servants or given out for some money by family members.

This place of pilgrimage is specifically meant for the devotees of Lord Siva; therefore it is called Saiva-ksetra, that is, the place where Lord Siva is worshiped. In this area there are mountains and forests. There are also two Siva temples, one known as Ramesvara and the other known as Sundaresvara. There is also a temple to Devi called the Minaksi-devi temple, which displays very great architectural craftsmanship. It was built under the supervision of the kings of the Pandya Dynasty, and when the Muslims attacked this temple, as well as the temple of Sundaresvara, great damage was done. In the Christian year 1372, a king named Kampana Udayar reigned on the throne of Madurai. Long ago, Emperor Kulasekhara ruled this area, and during his reign he established a colony of brahmanas. A well-known king named Anantaguna Pandya is an eleventh-generation descendant of Emperor Kulasekhara. [Sri Caitanya Caritamrta Madhya lila chapter 9 verse 179]

Madurai has a rich cultural heritage passed on from the great Tamil era more than 2500 years old. Madurai was an important cultural and commercial centre even as early as 550 AD. It was the capital city for the great Pandya kings. The Pandyan King Kulasekhara built a great temple and created a lotus shaped city around the temple. Madurai is famous for Jasmine Flowers.

Temples in and around Madurai:

1. Sri Meenakshi Amman - Sundareswarar Temple
2. Thiru Koodal - Sri Koodal Azhagar Perumal Temple
3. Thirumaalirunsolai - Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple
4. Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple
5. Sri Narasingam Yoga Narasimha Perumal Temple
6. Sri Matsayamoorthy in Thuvarimaan Agraharam
7. Hare Krishna (ISKCON) Madurai - Sri Sri Radha Mathurapathi Temple
8. ISKCON Thiruppalai - Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple
9. Thirukoshtiyur - Sri Sowmiya Narayana Perumal Temple (70 km from Madurai)
10. Srivilliputhur Andal Temple (also referred to as 'Varaha Ksetra' is 74 km from Madurai)

The Puranic story about origin of Madurai

It is narrated that Madurai was originally a forest known as *Kadamba vanam*. One day, a farmer named Dhananjaya who was passing through the forest, saw King Indra, worshipping a *svayambhu* (self-manifested Lingam) under Kadamba tree. Dhananjaya, the farmer immediately reported this to King Kulasekara Pandya. Kulasekara Pandya cleared the forest and built a temple around the Lingam. A city was soon planned with the temple as its centre. On the day the city was to be named, Lord Siva is said to have appeared and drops of nectar from his hair fell on the town. So, the place was named Madurai - *mathuram* meaning "sweetness" in Tamil.

Madurai has a rich historical background in the sense that Lord Siva himself performed 64 wonders called "Thiruvilaiyadals". After King Kulasekara Pandyan had already build a small temple with the Lingam which is now referred to as Lord Sundareswara, his son, Malayadhwaja Pandyan became the next King of the Pandyan empire.

For years, Malayadwaja and his consort Kanchanmala were unable to conceive any children. In attempts to beget a child, Malaydwaja conducted many Vedic sacrifices. Finally, in the middle of one such ritual, a three-year-old girl with three breasts emerged from the flames and sat on Kanchanmala's lap. The girl in fact was Goddess Parvati, who had taken birth as Kanchanmala's daughter in response to a prayer of hers in her past life.

In fact, Malayadwaja was a bit sad that he was not blessed with a son. But suddenly he heard a disembodied voice tell him that he should name the girl "Thadathangai" and to raise her as if she was were a son. The voice ensured Malayadwaja that the girl's third breast would be absorbed back into her body when she first cast her eyes on the man who would become her husband i.e. Lord Siva. The fish-eyed baby also never blinked her eyes, which was later thought of as "always keeping a careful eye on Madurai". For this reason, Madurai is also called "Thoonganagaram" which means "The city that never sleeps".

Malaydhwaja obeyed the divine command. He named Thadathangai his successor and taught her the art of war. After Malayadhwaja's death, Thadathangai ascended to the throne. She was the beloved of the people and came to be known as "Meenakshi" - the one with fish-like eyes. Meenakshi embarked on a *dig-vijaya*, a military campaign of victory across the length and breadth of India. After numerous victories on earth, Meenakshi attacked Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Siva. She defeated all the soldiers and generals of the Lord. Seeing this, Siva himself came to fight the undaunted queen. But as soon as Meenakshi saw the Lord, the prophecy of her youth bore fruit: she instantly fell in love with him and her third breast went back inside her body.

Siva directed Meenakshi to return to her home city, promising her that he would join her in 8 days as her bridegroom. And this is exactly what happened. They were married in Madurai with Lord Vishnu himself giving away Meenakshi to Siva. *Meenakshi Kalyanam*, the marriage of Meenakshi with Siva is celebrated annually to this day.

It is said that the Lord Siva performed several miracles during his wedding. There was nothing on the side of the bridegroom's party to match the regal splendour of the preparations made for his marriage; the story goes that on the wedding day, much to the astonishment of all, Lord Sundareswara, the bridegroom came only with a dwarf named "Gundodhara". Meenakshi, with a view to show her husband that she was very rich and powerful than him, haughtily remarked that the grand wedding arrangements would go waste since the bridegroom had not brought with him a large retinue befitting the occasion. Sundareswara said that it would be sufficient if they would be able to feed the dwarf brought with him. To the amazement of all, everything that Madurai could produce in the shape of things to eat and drink was not enough to satisfy appetite of Gundodhara. Gundodhara quickly consumed both the cooked and uncooked things and started asking for more. When there was nothing else left to eat, the dwarf began to cry for water to quench his thirst. All the water in the wells and reservoirs of the city had gone in the same way as the food. Sundareswara then directed a flow of water from his matted hair which is said to be Vaigai river and by drinking this the dwarf was satisfied.

1. Sri Meenakshi Amman - Sundareswarar Temple

The most well-known aspect of Madurai is the Meenakshi Sundareswara twin temple, the pivot around which the city has evolved. The Meenakshi temple complex is literally a city one of the largest of its kind in India, undoubtedly one of the oldest. Various kings have renovated it, adding convoluted corridors. It is believed that most of the temple as it stands today, owes its existence largely to the endeavour of the Nayaks, who, descending from the Vijayanagar rulers, guided its destiny in the 17th century.

Lord Siva in his incarnation as Sundareswara and his fish-eyed spouse, Meenakshi, are enshrined in this twin temple. There are four massive gateways enclosing these two temples. Facing the shrine of Sundareswara is the lavishly embellished '*Pudu Mandapam*', also known as '*Vasantha Mandapam*'. On each of the pillars, is represented Siva in his various manifestations. The attractive life-size statues of the ten Nayaka rulers together with their consorts are installed here. To the south of the main shrine dedicated to Siva, is the temple of Goddess Meenakshi. The structure with its two concentric enclosures is

about half the size of the main shrine. The porch leading to the temple is called "*Ashta Shakti Mandapam*" on account of the eight Shakti Goddesses figured therein.

There are in all 11 towers to this temple, the largest and most beautiful being the one on the southern doorway. Rising to a height of about 70 metres, this impressive '*gopuram*' is by far the most ornate and florid of the Dravidian towers. The temple complex is within a high-walled enclosure, at the core of which are the two sanctums for Meenakshi and Sundareswara, surrounded by a number of smaller shrines and grand pillared halls. Especially impressive are the 12 Gopuras. Their soaring towers rise from solid granite bases, and are covered with stucco figures of deities, beasts and monsters painted in vivid colours.

Sri Meenakshi Amman Deity: The Meenakshi Amman deity is carved out of a green stone. Some also say it is made up of emerald, hence Meenakshi is also called "*Maragathambal*" or "*Maragathavalli*". *Maragatham* is the Tamil word for emerald. The distinctive feature of the statue is its eyes. The eyes are big, beautiful and mysterious and Meenakshi is indeed a very apt name (*Meen*=Fish and *Eyes*= *Aksi*). Just like a Fish nourishes her siblings through her mercy laden glance, Similarly Meenakshi Amman also nourishes all her devotees with her merciful glance.

Swamy Sundareswarar Shrine: Lord Sundareswara (Siva) the consort of Goddess Meenakshi is to the north of Kilikoontu Mandapam. The deity of Sundarar is a Lingam. Kulasekara Pandyan, the grandfather of Meenakshi established the temple around this self-manifested Lingam here. On your way you can worship a gigantic deity of Sri Ganesh called Mukkurini Pillaiyar. When the king Thirumalai Nayakar excavated a temple tank 3 km from Meenakshi temple he unearthed this deity of Vinayaka and erected the same here.

Potramaraikulam (Golden lotus tank): This temple tank is an ancient tank where devotees take bath in the holy water. The area around this tank was the meeting place of the Tamil Sangam, the ancient academy of poets. This academy judged the worth of any work of literature presented before it by throwing it into the tank. Only those that did not sink were considered worthy of attention. The tank is surrounded by a pillared corridor. Steps lead down to the tank, enabling worshippers to take bath in it.

There is a nice pastime about this Golden lotus. Once Lord Indra had committed a terrible sin, and had to do a major penance to redeem himself. He came to Madurai, and decided to worship Lord Siva by offering 1000 lotuses. He was able to pluck 999 lotuses from the lake, but he couldn't find one more lotus. Heart broken, Indra wept and prayed to lord Siva. A golden lotus then bloomed from the centre of the pond and Indra was able to redeem himself from his sin. That is why the temple tank is called PotramaraiKulam (*Pon* = Gold, *Thamarai*=Lotus, *Kulam*=Tank).

Ashta Shakthi Mandapam: The roof of the Ashta Sakthi Mandapam is painted with rich colours. A visitor who enters the temple through the eastern gateway, first enters this Mandapam (Hall). It was built by Thirumalai Nayakar's wives Rudrapathi Ammal and Tholimamai. In this hall food was once distributed to the devotees who came from far off places. Next to this hall is the Meenakshi Nayaka Mandapa, a spacious columned hall used for shops and stores. This hall has a votive lamp-holder with 1,008 lamps, which are lit on festive occasions and present a spectacular sight. The sculptures on the pillars here relate some of Lord Siva's Thiruvilayadals (miracles) and also the story of Meenakshi's birth and her life as the princess of Madurai.

Oonjal Mandapam: The Oonjal (swing) Mandapam and Killikoontu (parrot cage) Mandapam are on the western side of the tank. Every Friday, the *utsav* deities of

Meenakshi and Sundareswara are seated on the swing in the *Oonjal Mandapam* and hymns are sung as the deities swing to and fro. The parrots in the *Kilikoontu Mandapam* have been trained to repeat Meenakshi's name. Interesting are also the 28 pillars of the mandapam which exhibit some excellent Sculptures of figures from Vedic scriptures.

The Thousand Pillar Mandapam: It is the 'wonder of the palace'. Actually the number of pillars counts to 985 beautifully decorated columns. Each pillar is sculptured and is a monument of the Dravidan sculpture. There is a Temple Art Museum in this 1000 pillars hall where you can see icons, photographs, drawings, etc., exhibiting the 1200 years old history. There are many other smaller and bigger *mandapams* in the temple. Just outside this *Mandapam* towards the west, are the Musical Pillars. Each pillar when stuck produces a different musical note. The *kalyana mandapa* to the south of the pillared hall, is where the marriage of Siva and Parvati is celebrated every year during the Chitirai Festival in mid-April.

Underground Mystery: The floor of the entire temple is covered by neatly cut rectangular rocks. These rocks are mostly plain, devoid of any carvings. If you tap on these rocks, it does not sound hollow. But, every certain number of rocks, there are square rocks with a lotus carved on them. If you tap on these "lotus rocks", they sound hollow! This supports the theory that there are hidden, underground structures in the Madurai Meenakshi Temple. These "lotus rocks" could be secret gateways into underground passages or cellars. It is well documented that most Indian Kings had secret escape routes and hidden treasures underground.



Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple



Sri Meenakshi Amman



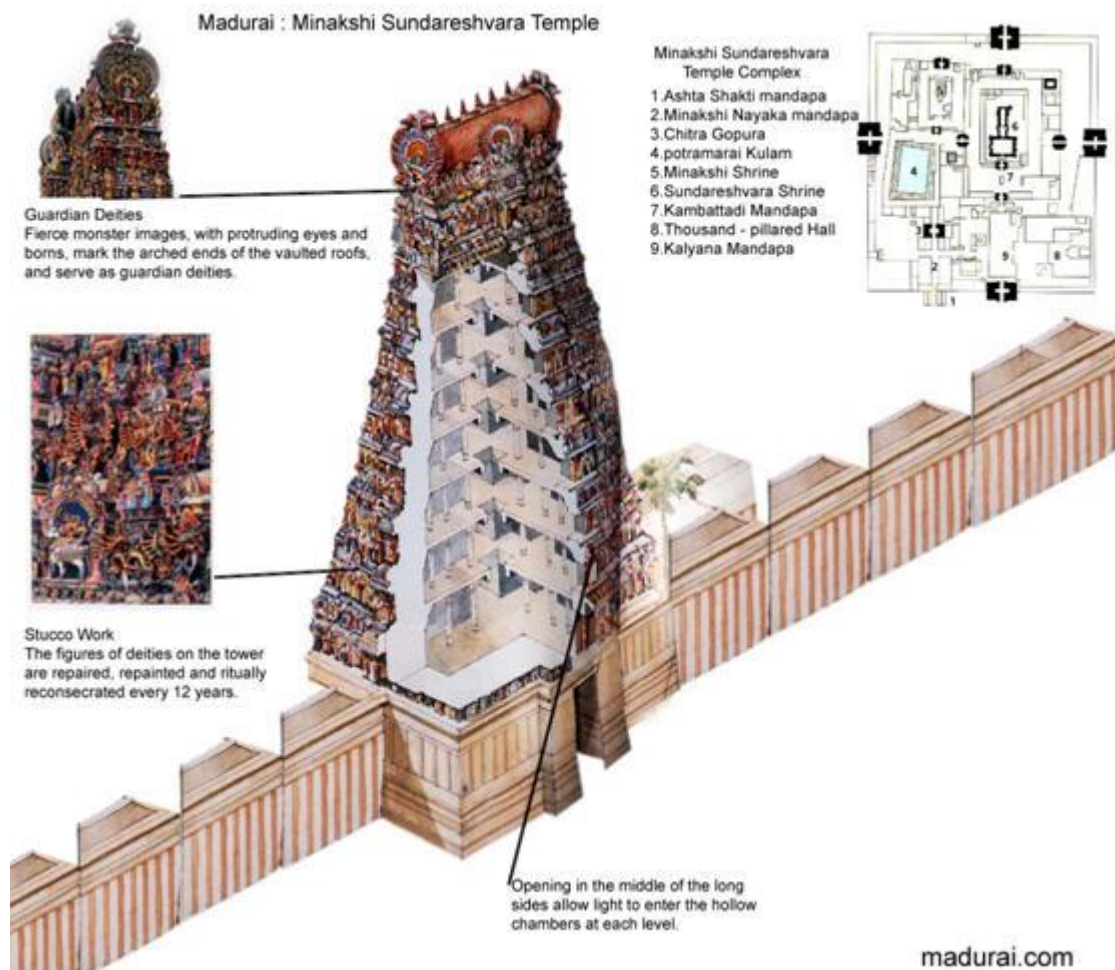
Sri Meenakshi Amman Deity



Swamy Sundareswara Shrine



Magnificent Thousand Pillar Hall at Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple



Temple architecture

The temple is designed based on the human body. There are 5 main entrances based on the human senses (see, hear, smell, taste and touch). There are 9 smaller entrances to the inside complex that denote the 9 orifices of the human body (2 eyes, 2 nostrils, 2 ears, mouth, urethra and anus). The streets of Madurai are constructed as concentric circles, with the temple at the centre. This is also thought of as a "Lotus Formation". The temple is one of the masterpieces of Dravidian architecture.



Southern Gopuram of Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple



Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple



Mariamman Teppakkulam Tank

This huge tank, 300m (1000 ft) by 285m (950 ft), is located 5km east of the Meenakshi Temple. This is where the Teppam Float Festival takes place, during which the deities are taken out on decorated boats in Jan/Feb. The tank is fed water from the Vaigai River through underground channels. It is usually only filled during the Teppam Festival.

2. Thiru Koodal - Sri Koodal Azhagar Perumal Temple

Thiru Koodal Azhagar Perumal Temple is situated in the heart of Madurai, ½ km from Meenakshi Amman Temple. This is an ancient Temple and is one of the 108 *Divya Desams*, the holy abodes of Lord Vishnu. Lord is seen in all three postures: sitting, standing, and reclining. At the base Tier is Koodal Azhagar in a grand sitting posture under the Serpent Lord Adishesan. Climbing about 20 steps on to Tier 1, one sees the Lord in a Sleeping Posture. And another 10 steps above, in Tier 2, is Lord Surya Narayanan in a standing posture. The main deity of the temple is Koodal Alagar, who is in a sitting posture. Above the shrine of this deity are the altars of Sri Ranganatha, in a reclining pose, and Sri Surya-Narayan Perumal, in a standing pose. There are intricate woodcarvings here including one of Lord Ramacandra's coronation. All twelve Alwars visited this place. It is stated in the Mahabharata that both Yudhisthira and Arjuna came here.

Koodal Azhagar appeared to slay the demon Somuka who abducted the four Vedas. As per legend, a ruler named Vallabhadeva went incognito every day to know about the lives of people under him. During one of his visits, a scholar told him that the ultimate goal in life is to "collect provisions in summer and save for winter", which also meant that one should work during his younger days and save for his old age. Vallabadeva was not convinced and he set this as a competition among scholars to make him realize the true value of life. Vishnucitta, who would later go on to become Periazhwar, one of the twelve most revered saints of Sri Vaishnava, came to Madurai from Srivilliputhur. Directed by Lord Vishnu Himself, he expounded the sacred verses. He explained the concepts of *Hitham* and *Purushartham* from Vedas and proclaimed that attaining the lotus feet of Lord Narayana is the ultimate goal of life. Vallabhadeva was pleased with the explanation and he awarded a bag of gold to Visnucitta. It is believed that the current *gopuram* of Srivilliputhur Temple, was built by Periazhwar with the gold won.



Sri Koodal Azhagar Temple



Sri Koodal Azhagar Perumal



Sri Koodal Azhagar Temple



பல்லாண்டு பல்லாண்டு பல்லாமிரத்தாண்டு
பலகோடி நூறாயிரம்
பல்லாண்ட திண்டிடை மணிவண்ணா, உன்
சேவடி செவ்விதிருக்காப்பு

அழியாமோரும் நின்னோரும்
பிரிவின்றி ஆயிரம் பல்லாண்டு
வடிவாய் நின் வலமார்பினில்
வாழ்கின்ற மங்கையும் பல்லாண்டு
வடிவாய் நின் வலமார்பினில்

Legend of Periazhwar



Sri Koodal Azhagar Temple

3. Thirumaalirunsolai - Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple

Kallazhagar Temple is an important Vaishnava Temple, located 20 km from Madurai. The presiding deity of this temple is also known as Meenakshi Amman's brother. The temple is situated in a scenic place with Vrishabhadri hill as the backdrop for this temple. The temple is called "*Dakshina Tirupati*". "*Kallar*" in Tamil means *thief*. *The Perumal is called with this name because He steals the heart of all his devotees. It is said that Yamaraja, the Lord of death, comes here daily at night to worship the Perumal.* The temple tower is an astounding structure with wonderful sculptures. At the entrance of the temple, we can find the Badri Narayan temple, built similar to Badrinath in North India. The principal deity is Badri Narayan in a meditative posture, flanked by Nara-Narayanan. Andal is in an unusual sitting posture.

The Azhagar Utsavam on Chitra Pournami is a highly popular festival. It is celebrated for almost 9 days; the first 4 days are being celebrated in the hill and He leaves for Madurai city on the 4th day and returns back to the hill on the 9th day. His entrance to the Madurai city is celebrated as "*Edhir Sevai*" and a garland of Tulasi from Srivilliputhur Sri Andal is adorned over Him. The wedding of Madurai Meenakshi and Sundareswara popularly known as "*Meenakshi Kalyana utsavam*" takes place as another grand *utsavam* in Koodal Azhagar temple. Perumal is the brother of Goddess Meenakshi and He is the one who offers his sister's hands to Lord Sundareswara during their marriage. It's a very famous portrait involving the three. Kallazhagar seated on a horse *vahana*, witnesses the Meenakshi Sundareswara wedding as the brother of Meenakshi and proceeds towards the Vaigai river. Azhagar getting into the Vaigai river is popularly referred as "Azhagar AattrilIranguthal" festival. Lakhs of devotees come to Madurai to witness this festival.

As many as 6 Alwars have showered praise at this Temple. In centuries gone by, the direction to this place was identified as being 150 km South of Cauvery and about 150 km East of Palani Hills. A 4 km walk up the Azhagar hills (dense terrain) will take one to Silambaaru water falls (Nupoor Gangai), where one can have a bath in the sacred water. There is also a road route available now, up the hill. It is believed that drops of sacred water fell at this place when Brahma was washing Lord Vishnu's feet after His Vamana Avataar. And that these drops spread as River Nupoor Gangai. To this day, the sacred water from Silambaaru is used for the daily *poojas*. Legend has it that one who has the sacred water at Azhagar Koil will be cleansed of all sins.

10 day Chitra Festival - The most famed event in Madurai: Every year in the Tamil month of Chitirai, Azhagar is taken on his Garuda Vaahanam on a 20 km procession. He is said to go to the Vaigai in Madurai to provide Moksham to Mandaka Rsi. During this trip, he stops at different places along the way, with the Maduraites welcoming him into the city. On the way to the Vaigai River, KallAzhagar makes an important stop at Thallaakulam Perumal Koil to collect the garland sent by Andaal of Srivilliputhur. Only after wearing this, does Azhagar get into the Vaigai River. During the *Aadi Thiruvadi Pooram* festival, marking the birthday of Andaal, Lord Azhagar sends his attire to Srivilliputhur as a 'return gesture' to her. In course of time, Thirumalai Naayakar, the then ruler of the Pandya Kingdom decided to combine this festival with the Meenakshi Amman festival to make it the biggest festival of Madurai. The belief is that KallAzhagar makes it to Madurai to witness the wedding of his sister Meenakshi(Amman). This is yet another case of the Unity between Saivites and Vaishnavites.

18 Steps at Azhagar Koil: Once there was an attempt to take away the deity of KallAzhagar. A priest at this temple put together a team and captured the 18 men who had come there to steal the deity. These 18 men were so lured by the beauty of Azhagar that they prayed to the Lord and requested that they stay here for ever. It is believed that each of these 18 men have taken a step each and now reside in the 18 steps of the temple at the main Eastern entrance. Realising their mistake, they sought to act as security

guards of the Lord and solve any issues relating to the people. Hence, Karuppanna Swamy almost acts as a court to solve all issues in this area and is said to provide a fair judgment for those who believe in him. As a mark of this event, there is an image of 'Karuppanna Swamy' (the representative of these 18 men) at the main entrance. This main Eastern Entrance remains closed through the year except for 9 days in the Tamil month of Aadi and one can get inside the temple through the North East entrance. Every night, during the pooja time, the flowers adorned by the Lord is brought to Karuppanna Swamy.

Andal Weds Azhagar: Andaal and her father Periazhvaar are said to have come here from Srivilliputhur and legend has it that Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam appeared before Andaal as Azhagar and married her. Andal who had promised to provide Azhagar with 100 pots of sweet morsel and butter could not do so as she merged with Lord Ranganatha. Much later, Ramanuja fulfilled her promise by providing the Lord with the morsel and butter. As a thanking gesture, Andal is said to have called him 'Annan' (elder brother), as a result of which Ramanuja came to be called 'Kovil Annan'.



Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



Hare Krishna devotees performing Harinam Sankirtana inside Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



The wedding of Madurai Meenakshi and Sundareswara popularly known as "Meenakshi Kalyanautsavam"



Kallazhagar seated on a horse vahana, witnesses the Meenakshi Sundareswara wedding as the brother of Meenakshi and proceeds towards the Vaigai river.



Devotees doing Krishna Consciousness Book Distribution at Sri Kallazhagar Perumal Temple



Local Coconuts

4. Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple

Thiru Moghur Kaalamega Perumal Temple is an important Vaishnava temple situated 10 km from Madurai. This Temple is glorified in the *Divya Prabandha*, the early medieval Tamil canon of the Azhwar saints from the 6th-9th centuries AD. It is one of the *108 Divya desams* dedicated to Vishnu, who is worshipped as Neelamegha Perumal and His consort Lakshmi as *Tirukannapura Nayagi*. As per legend, the presiding deity appeared as a female Mohini to lure the *asuras* to support Devas, the celestial deities. The temple is also known as *Mohanapuram* and *Mohanakshetram*.

Once a demon by name Bhasmasura did penance. Lord Siva granted him a boon that when he touches anyone's head, the person would turn to ashes. Bhasmasura wanted to test the boon and wanted to touch the head of Lord Siva. A bewildered Siva ran to seek the favour of Vishnu, who took the form of damsel Mohini. She lured Bhasmasura with Her dance and made Bhasmasura touch his head with his hand. The demon Bhasmasura was thus defeated. The place where Mohini lured (meaning Moham) came to be known as *Thirumohur*. According to another legend, there was a fight between the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons) during the churning of the Ocean of Milk for Amrita (ambrosia). *Asuras* were able to overpower *Devas* and the Devas sought Vishnu's help. Vishnu appeared as Mohini to lure the *asuras* and gave them empty pot. It is believed that Thirumohur is the place of the event.

The temple is more than 2000 years old and has been referred to in *Akananuru*, *Padhitrupathu*, *Madurai kanchi* and also in one of the five great epics of Tamil literature, *Silappatikaram*. A granite wall surrounds the temple, enclosing all its shrines and three of its four bodies of water. The temple has a five-tiered *rajagopuram*, the temple's gateway tower and a huge temple tank in front of it. The temple is believed to have been built by the Pandyas, with later additions from the Madurai Nayaks.



Sacred Temple Tank



Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple



Presiding Deities at Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple



Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple



Thiru Moghur - Sri Kaalamegha Perumal Temple

5. Sri Narasingam Yoga Narasimha Perumal Temple

Narasingam is a village located 8 km from Madurai on the road to Melur. It is named for the nearby cave temple dedicated to Yoga Narasimha Perumal, at the foot of the

Yanaimalai hills. This temple was constructed in 770 A.D. by Madurakavi alias Marankaari who was the minister of the Madurai King Parantaka Nedunjadaiyan. There is a front mandapam (court). The sculpture of Narasinga Perumal is carved out of the hill itself. In front of this there is a stone temple for the goddess Narasingavalli.

According to the *Sthala Purana*, sage Romasa had installed the Narasimha deity in a cave in the hill. The 87th chapter of the Uttara Kanda of the Brahmanda Purana says the sage did penance on the banks of the Padma Thadagam, as it was filled with lotus flowers, near the Gajagiri Kshetram (the present Yanaimalai) seeking progeny, and wanted the Lord to appear in His Narasimha avatar. The Lord appeared as Ugra Narasimha and the heat that emanated from Him was unbearable. Even the celestials were affected by it and they all came to Gajagiri Kshetram and prayed to the Lord to calm down. The Lord could not be pacified and then they sought the help of Prahlada, whose arrival quietened Him to some extent. They prayed to the Goddess Maha Lakshmi, who also took Her abode in Him as Narasingavalli, after which He became Yoga Narasimha. The Lord later granted the boon sought by the sage.



Sri Narasingam Yoga Narasimha Perumal Temple



Beautiful hill and lotus flowers at Sri Narasingam Yoga Narasimha Perumal Temple



6. Sri Matsayamoorthy Temple in Thuvarimaan Agraharam **Appearance place of Matsya Avatar**

This temple is located at 10 km from Madurai on the banks of Vaigai river. There are only a few temples dedicated to Matsya Avatar of Lord Vishnu and this holy place, considered as South Dwarka, is believed to be the avatar *sthalam* of Matsya Moorthy. This temple is maintained by *Tirumala Tirupathi Devathanam*. The sun rays fall on the Lord during the Sunset (6pm to 6.15pm). They fall at the feet on the first day, on the chest on the second day and on forehead on the third day. This happens once in a year, on the 12th, 13th, 14th days of Phalguna month (March). *Matsya avatar lila* took place in the vicinity of Madurai on the banks of river Kritamala. Lord appeared as a fish to great devoted king Satyavrat.

[Ref. Sri Caitanya Caritamrta Madhya 9.197] Presently the Kritamala River is known as the river Bhagai or Vaigai. This river has three tributaries, named Suruli, Varaha-nadi and Battilla-gundu. The river Kritamala is also mentioned in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* 11.5.39 by the sage Karabhajana."

The Krtamala River is made famous in sastra from very ancient days, long before the advent of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. For example, Krtamala-theertham features prominently in the story of Matsya Avatara. It was the holy Krtamala in which Satyavrata was offering oblations when a small fish swam into his cupped hands. This pastime is nicely summarized: "During the Caksusa-manvantara, a devotee of Lord Narayana named King Satyavrata performed severe austerities by drinking only water. One day, Satyavrata was offering oblations in the Krtamala River when he saw a tiny fish in the water cupped in his palms. Satyavrata, the king of Dravida, threw the fish into the water. The small fish then said in great distress, "O merciful king! I am a small fish; big fish will eat Me. Knowing this, why did you throw Me into the river? I am very scared. Please protect Me." Hearing the distressful words of the fish, the king placed the fish in his water pot and went back to his asrama. Within one night, the small fish grew so much that it was difficult for it to remain in the water-pot. The fish again offered prayers expressing that it did not want to remain in that difficult condition. It wanted to be kept in a bigger pot where it could move about freely; so the sage put the fish into the water of a big wok. But in that place, within one muhurta (48 minutes), it again expanded to the length of three hands.

Upon the repeated prayers of the fish, it was placed in a pond, then a large freshwater lake, and finally the ocean. While entering into the ocean, the fish spoke to King Satyavrata in a humorous way, "There are many large crocodiles and other creatures in the ocean; they will eat Me. It is not proper to leave Me here." Hearing the sweet words of the fish, the king understood that it was not an ordinary fish. This wonderful entity was the Supreme Lord Himself in the form of a fish. The king replied, "You are making fun of me in Your form as a fish. Who are You actually? Within one day You have occupied the entire area of this huge freshwater lake, 800 miles long. I have never seen or heard of such an amazing and powerful aquatic. You must surely be the Supreme Lord Hari. You have taken the form of an aquatic to favor all the living beings. I am taking shelter of You. Please grace me." The evidence of the Puranas definitely locates the Kul-acala or Kula-parvata (literally, a mountain associated with certain tribes) called Malaya, which was the source of the Tamraparni and Krtamala (Vaigai) rivers running through the Pandya country, at the extreme southern end of the Western Ghats."

As was the case with Lord Caitanya's pastimes at the River Kaveri, where Lord Balarama also visited, in the case of the Krtamala River we find that Lord Balarama also took bath here: Srimad-Bhagavatam 10.79.16-17: "There at Setubandha (Ramesvaram) Lord Halayudha gave brahmanas 10,000 cows in charity. He then visited the Krtamala and

Tamraparni rivers and the great Malaya Mountains. In the Malaya range Lord Balarama found Agastya Rsi sitting in meditation. After bowing down to the sage, the Lord offered him prayers and then received blessings from him. Taking leave from Agastya, He proceeded to the shore of the southern ocean, where He saw Goddess Durga in her form of Kanya-kumari." And just as the Sri Balabhadra-sahasra-nama gives the Kaveri as one of Lord Balarama's names, so, too, He is named for the holy Krtamala in 'Sri Balabhadra-sahasra-nama - A Thousand Names of Lord Balarama', which Garga Muni gave to the gopis on the beautiful bank of the Yamuna River.



Sri Matsyamoorthy Temple in Thuvaraman Agraharam



Matsya Avatar

7. Hare Krishna (ISKCON) Madurai - Sri Sri Radha Mathurapathi Temple

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has two Temples in Madurai:

- 1. Sri Sri Radha Mathurapathi Temple: Address: 37 Maninagaram Main Road, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India – 625001. This Temple is very near to Madurai railway station and Meenakshi Temple.*
- 2. Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple: Address: 347 North Masi Street, Madurai. This Temple has a "Jai Prahlada School" as well.*



Sri Sri Radha Mathurapathi Temple - ISKCON Madurai



Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Mathurapathi Temple at ISKCON Madurai Temple



ISKCON 50 and 1000th Anniversary of Appearance of Sripad Ramanujacarya celebrations in Madurai



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ISKCON 50 and 1000th Anniversary of Appearance of Sripad Ramanujacarya celebrations in Madurai

8. ISKCON Thiruppalai - Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple

ISKCON Thiruppalai Temple is at address: New Natham Main Road, Thiruppalai, Madurai. This Temple has a "Jai Prahlada School" as well.

மதுரை மாநகராட்சி

ஹரே கிருஷ்ணா சாலை
HARE KRISHNA ROAD

வார்டு எண் : 24

Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple - ISKCON Madurai



Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple - ISKCON Madurai



Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple - ISKCON Madurai



Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama



Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama Temple - ISKCON Madurai

9. Thirukoshtiyur - Sri Sowmiya Narayana Perumal Temple

Thirukoshtiyur, derived from its native name Thirukotiyur. During Kritha yuga, Rishis, demigods and people were tortured, anguished by the *asura* Hiranyakashipu as vengeance for Hiranyaksha's death at the hands of Lord Krishna in His form as Varaha Avatar. Demigods and Rishis then approached Brahma and Siva for a solution. In response, Brahma, Siva, all demigods, *Saptha Rishis* decided to meet at a place to discuss the issue. Finally, all chose Thirukotiyur as the place for meeting. They came together as a group and so the name Thirukoshtiyur, *koshti* means in group or as a team. Thirukoshtiyur is known for its great temple, Sowmya Narayana Perumal temple. Thirukoshtiyur is a village located near Tirupathur (on Tirupathur-Sivaganga road) on the way to Sivaganga. It is located at a distance of 62 km from Madurai.

At Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Temple, besides consorts Mothers Sridevi and Bhoodevi, Lord Sowmya Narayana Perumal graces the devotees with Madhu, Kaitabha and Indira, emperor Pururuva, Kadamba Maharshi, Brahmma, Mothers Saraswathi and Savithri. Lord Santhana Krishna is in a cradle.

Indira was staying in this place till Lord killed Hiranya and gave the Sowmya Narayana Vighraha to Kadamba Maharshi. He was worshipping Perumal in his Indraloka earlier. This is the procession deity of this temple. It is noteworthy that sculptor Vishwakarma and demon sculptor Mayan had jointly worked in the design and construction of the Ashtanga Vimana. The Vimana has three petals representing the three syllables "Om, Namoh, Narayanaya". Perumal blesses the devotees in four forms from the Vimana - as Nartana Krishna (Bhooloka Perumal) from the base petal, as Sowmya Narayana Perumal (Tiruparkadal-Milk Ocean-Perumal) from the first tier in reclining form, as Upendra Narayana (Devaloka Perumal) in the second tier, as Paramapada Nathar (Vaikuntha Perumal) in a sitting form in the third tier.

Teaching to Sri Ramanuja: Thirukoshtiyur Nambi living in Thirukoshtiyur was a great scholar in scriptures. Ramanuja approached him for initiation in Mantras. He called Nambi standing outside. Nambi asked who the caller was. Ramanuja said "*I am Ramanujan.*" (*I in English means Naan in Tamil, an expression of disobedience or arrogance in spiritual terms*). Nambi simply asked Ramanuja to go back and return after the death of Naan. Ramanuja did not understand what Nambi meant. Yet, he came to Nambi 17 times and returned back with the same answer.

When Ramanuja came finally the 18th time, he told Nambi that 'Adiyen' (meaning the humble disciple) has come. Nambi called Ramanuja and taught the Mantra '*Om Namō Narayana*' on condition that this should not be disclosed to anybody and if he violated the condition, he (Ramanuja) would be pushed into the hell. But compassionate Ramanuja wanted this Mantra made available to one and all so that all would receive the choice grace of Lord Perumal. He climbed the Vimana, called the masses and taught them the great Mantra. Angry Nambi appeared there and condemned Ramanuja's disobedience.

Ramanuja politely told Nambi that though as an individual, he was to get the hell for displeasing his Guru; millions would be blessed with the benefits of chanting Lord's Mantra. Startled Nambi embraced Ramanuja saying that he was greater than him (Nambi). Ramanuja appears on the Vimana from where he preached the Narayana Mantra to all. Nambi's house is just opposite this *vimana* known as *Kal Maligai*. There are separate shrines for Nambi and Sri Ramanuja in the temple.

Mahamakha Well: While Emperor Pururupa was carrying out renovation of this temple, the great Mahamaga festival of Kumbakonam also coincided. The emperor wished to have Perumal *darshan* in this place. Responding to his prayer, Holy Ganga sprang up in the well at the northeast side and Perumal gave *darshan* to the emperor from this well. The well is thus named Mahamaga Kinaru. 'Well' means Kinaru in Tamil. This festival occurs once in 12 years when Lord grants *darshan* sitting on his Garuda Vahana.



Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal Temple, Thirukoshtiyur



Lord Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal



Lord Nrsimhadeva



Exact spot at the top of the Sri Sowmya Narayana Perumal from where Sripad Ramanujacarya, out of great compassion for common masses called aloud the mantra 'Om Namo Narayana'.



10. Srivilliputhur Andal Temple

(also referred Varaha Ksetra)

Srivilliputhur, also referred as *Varaha Ksetra* is 74 km from Madurai. Lord Krishna in His avatar as Varaha, after killing demon Hiranyaksha, took rest here. The land around Srivilliputhur was under the rule of Queen Malli. The queen had two sons called Villi and Kandan. While the two were hunting in a forest, a tiger killed Kandan. Unaware of this, Villi searched for his brother, got tired and fell asleep. In his dream, Lord Varaha narrated to him what happened to his brother. By His orders, Villi founded a city. The city is originally named after its founder, Villi forming the word Sri-Villi-Puthur. Srivilliputhur is the birthplace of two of the most important *alvars* (saints) in the Vaishnavite tradition: Periyazhvar and Andal.

The history of Srivilliputhur centres around the Srivilliputhur Temple, dedicated to Andal (8th century or earlier), the only female Alvar of the 12 Alvar saints of South India. She is credited with the devotional works of Thiruppavai and Nachiar Tirumozhi that are still recited by devotees during the winter festival season of Margazhi. Andal is known for her unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu. Adopted by her father, the Alvar saint Periyalvar who found her as a baby under the Tulasi plant, Andal avoided earthly marriage. Srivilliputtur finds mention in the *Brahmakaivatsa purana* and the *Varaha purana*. The *Varaha purana* foretells the existence of Srivilliputtur and the consequent visit of Lord as Varaha Avatar.



Srivilliputhur Temple



Andal



Srivilliputhur Temple



Annual chariot festival Srivilliputhur Temple

Srila Narayana Bhatta Gosvami



[Ref. His Holiness Radhanath Swami Maharaj's Yatra 2005] By the influence of time, the major deities of the Vraja Bhoomi were lost. To reveal those deities, Sri Rupa and Sanatana Gosvami have worked very hard, put lot of endeavours for our benefit to reveal them to the world. In the similar lines of sampradaya one great devotee was born whose name was Narayana Bhatta Gosvami. The birth place of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami happens to be Madurai. The father's name of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami was Bhaskar Bhatta and mother's name was Yashomati. His Grandfather's name was Shankar Bhatta. According to our scriptures, Narayana Bhatta Gosvami was born in 1645. The mother's name of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami is Yashomati and Krishna's mother's name is Yasoda. Yasoda means one who gives glories to others. Similarly the mother of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami offered this great glorious son to the whole world. At the age of 12 years, he wrote a very wonderful scripture known as Vraja Yasho Deepika. He accepted training in spiritual life from his grandfather, Shankar Bhatta, who had very, in early age, had done Vraja Parikrama. He was fully trained by his grandfather. Whatever he learned about Vraja Bhoomi, he wrote in his literature called, *Vraja Deepika*.

At the age of 12 years, one time he was taking bath in a river, at that moment of time, Sri Radha Madhava appeared to him and offered a set of deities to him. The name of this *sri vigraha* was **Lad le**, which means one who is very greatly loved. These deities were always travelling with Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, wherever he went. From the place where He was revealed to Narayana Bhatta Gosvami at Godavari the deity spoke to him, Lad Le, that please take me to the place where actual real love and affection is offered, that is Vraja Bhoomi. From Godavari, he travelled walking for 2½ years and reached Radha Kunda. At the age of 14½ years, with the deity Lad Le, he reached Radha Kunda. At that

time Sri Radha Madan Mohanji was staying at Radha Kunda. Srila Sanatana Gosvami was very old at that time and was staying at Radha Kunda and his associate Krishna Das Brahmachari also was staying with him at Radha Kunda. At the time when he reached Radha Kunda, it was summer season, hot afternoon. The moment they reached due to tiredness they all went to sleep. At that time the deities of Radha Madan Mohanji Himself opened the door of His temple and welcomed Narayana Bhatta Gosvami. Sri Madan Mohanji embraced the deity of Lad Le and said, *"My dear Lad Le has come."*

As the Lord Madan Mohanji embraced Lad Le ji, and discussed some matters with Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, the devotees who were asleep in the afternoon time, they got up and they came running to the temple and seeing the Lord meeting His devotee and discussing with him they all in great joy performed sankirtan. After that they all made arrangements for stay and prasadam for Narayana Bhatta Gosvami and Lad Le ji, the deity of Lad Le ji was kept next to Radha Madan Mohanji. The deity Radha Madan ji who delivered the deity of Lad Le to Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, appeared to him in the dream and instructed him that through Krishna Das Brahmachari he should write literatures and publish them for the benefit of the world. After he wrote all the scriptures, literatures, he performed Vraja Parikrama with the deity of Lad Le. Wherever he travelled with the deity of Sri Lad Le ji would sit in his lap and give him instructions and guidance about the glories of those places where he would go.

The Radha Kunda and Shyam Kunda were first revealed by Rupa and Sanatana Gosvami, but it again had been temporarily lost. Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, again revealed it for the benefit of the world. Wherever he went, as the deities revealed the places to him, he revealed those places for the benefit of the whole world. When he explained to the Vrajawasis about the Radha Kunda and Shyam Kunda, the Vrajawasis initially opposed him. When the Vrajawasis opposed, Narayana Bhatta Gosvami got the place excavated at the length of 15 forearm lengths and what was revealed was, the Radha Kunda which had ghats bedded with jewels. When they saw the wonderful revelation of Radha Kunda with ghats made of jewels the Vrajawasis were very much surprised and happy. After revealing this Radha Kunda and Shyam Kunda to Vrajawasis he travelled to Varsana and then he revealed the deity of Shree Ji. It is by the mercy of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, the deity of Shree ji, who's residing in Varsana was revealed. The deity of Lad Le Ji inspired Narayana Bhatta Gosvami that "My dear most consort is residing in this place, Varsana. You please with the help of children, perform the Rasa lila of Krishna and Radharani in this place." When the drama was performed, the character who became Radharani, suddenly disappeared in earth. The Vrajawasis were very angry. They said, "You have made our daughter disappear in this place." Then Narayana Bhatta Gosvami went away. There was a tree called Kareel. This is one specific tree in Vraja Bhoomi. He went and under the tree of Kareel, not only got the girl back but also he got the deity of Radharani with him.

After this he went to Uchagaon, which is a place of Lalita sakhi and he revealed the deity of Dao Ji, Sri Balarama Ji, over there. After this he travelled to Mathura, Vishram Ghat. When he went there he saw that the Vrajawasis at Mathura were getting ready to go to Prayaj Yatra at the Triveni Sangam. The Vrajawasis at Vishram Ghat, they had decided one time that we will go in number of 251 Vrajawasis for the yatra of Prayag, but somehow every year they would fall short of 10 or 15, either 230 or 240 Vrajawasis. The yatra was not completed as per their desire. It is said in Vraja Bhoomi that the Vrajawasis cannot be weighted in a scale, like we cannot weigh the frogs because they get separated very fast. Like that, Vrajawasis are very special people. They cannot be weighed in a scale. Narayana Bhatta Gosvami spoke to the Vrajawasis at Mathura Vishram Ghat, that, "You're trying to go to Triveni, sangham yatra, but real Triveni is available at Uchagaon." He took all those 251 Vrajawasis from Vishram Ghat, brought them to Uchagaon and there is a mountain called Sakhi Giri near Varsana, behind Varsana. From the Sakhi Giri, up to the Dao Ji temple he revealed, in Uchagaon which is there. Dao Ji temple is there in Uchagaon.

From Sakhi Giri to Dao Ji temple in Uchagaon, he revealed the Triveni Sangham darshan for the benefit of Vrajawasis. These 251 Vrajawasis very joyfully and happily performed their sacred bath at the Triveni Sangham revealed in that place. They said our whole journey of travelling to Triveni Sangham is saved.

At that time a very unusual thing happened. The personified, Prayagraj, the person of Dhama, Prayagraj, appeared over there and he chastised Narayana Bhatta Gosvami. Vrajawasis got, in turn, angry with Prayagraj and they said, "You are trying to chastise Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, but he is bowing down to you, so it is very clear to all of us that Narayana Bhatta Gosvami is better than you." The Vrajawasis said that, "One who bows down in humility, he has some substance in him, that's why he bows down. One who is ... Difficult for him to bend, one who's proud because of his pride ... One who doesn't bend it is actually a sign of a dead person." After this the personality of Prayagraj appeared to the vision of everybody fully and he discussed the scriptures with Narayana Bhatta Gosvami. At that time, Narayana Bhatta Gosvami said, "I am not a great scholar of scriptures. I only know the personality who is in truth available for us." At that time, Narayana Bhatta Ji revealed his form of Narada Muni. Then the revelation of Narada Muni, in the form Narada Muni and Prayagraj personality, they discussed about scriptures within them. Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, in the form of Narada Muni satisfied the personality of Prayagraj in the course of 7 days discussion. At that moment of time, Prayagraj fell at the feet of Narada Muni and promised Narada Muni that, "I will, in my form, in my Ansharoop, I will reside in all the holy places of Vraja Bhomi."

In this way, Narayana Bhatta Gosvami, revealed many, many holy places of Vraja Bhoomi. Narayana Bhatta Gosvami also, started many, many festivals in Nandagaon and Varsana. One lila called Bodhi Lila which he inaugurated, it is even going on today. This Bodhi Lila means, the cowherd boys or cowherd men from Nandagaon they come to Varsana and at the Gevar Vana area near Sankri Khor, they come together and they sing beautiful songs of Krishna's past times. He also started the festival of Radhastami, Rangeeli Holi and Nandagaon, other festivals he inaugurated. He was the only personality who started the Vraja Parikrama and also, the performance of Rasa Lila, the dramatics of Krishna's past times. Narayana Bhatta Gosvami was appeared on Lord Nrsimhadeva's appearance day. He disappeared on the appearance day of Vamana Dev. On these two occasions, Varsanawasis and Nandgoanwasis celebrate a great festival on both these days in the honour of Narayana Bhatta Gosvami.

Directions to reach Madurai:

Madurai is one of the major cities of Tamil Nadu and is well connected to rest of India via railways, road and air. Madurai has an international airport. Madurai serves as a common stop to change over to go to either Rameswaram (to its south-east) or Kanyakumari (to its south-west), which are on different directions.

